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THE NEW PATH.

PUBLISHED BY THE

Society for the Advancement of
TRUTH IN ART.

No. 2.] "Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things that shall be hereafter." [June, 1863.

"A FEW QUESTIONS ANSWERED."

An Essay Read before the Society, Tuesday, March 31, 1863.

BY THOMAS CHARLES FARRER.

ART, according to ancient tradition, came to us through love. A young girl having parted with her lover, as he left the house, saw his shadow on the wall, and was seized with the very natural desire to fix and keep it there. Acting on this impulse, she took a stick of burnt wood from the fire, and chalked out the form of her lover. So, you see, in the very birth of Art, we have painting in its right place, on the walls of a building. The story may be a fiction, or it may be true, but, true or false, I like it. The right practice of Art, and the study of it, is essentially a work of love. In the artist, it is the love of beautiful forms, and lively colors, and the overbearing desire which he feels to give it expression, that first sends him out into the fields to work; this work being the greatest enjoyment he finds in life. And, now, let me say a few words about this "work," and I speak on this point from personal experience, so it is not my opinion, my ideas, or my thoughts that I tell you, but, simply, the facts, the things which I know; for I am sorry to say, I too, wasted a great deal of time, working in the old way, before I knew any better. Oh, I wish I could express in words, and make you feel how much happier I have been since I have been working rightly, doing the truth, and what a glorious conscious-

ness it is, after a summer of earnest effort, to know that however faulty your work may be, and whatever its shortcomings, yet, it is absolutely right, that you sought God's truth, and sat down and did it. The critics and Art public generally, used to coarse, bad work, and having had their natural right feeling for delicate drawing, fine colors, and beautiful forms, deadened by an artificial and long continued admiration of false work, when they see artists doing their simplest duty and drawing leaves or trees in such a fanatical manner, that you can really tell, by looking at their pictures, whether it is an Oak, an Elm, or a Pine, and painting rocks with such "painful fidelity" that you can actually see the difference between Trap Granite and red Sandstone—"What!" say the discerning public, "are painters to become botanists and geologists! If this sort of thing comes into fashion what will become of the ideal!" The public, instead of opening their hearts and receiving these signs of vitality and life with joy and gladness, receive them with a howl of scorn and disdain, and the works in which the artist has been true to his calling, and made trees look like trees, and rocks like rocks, and moreover has had the awful audacity to paint the summer trees green, think of it! are characteriz-

ed as finished with the "painful fidelity of the Pre-Raphaelites." "Its details are wrought out with agonizing fidelity," "The cold remorseless fidelity with which every detail—" &c., &c. These expressions are literal quotations from some of the best Art criticism that New York has yet produced. Poor, weak critics, how it must shake their delicate nerves to see honesty and truth! I feel anxious to know whether they are consistent men, whether truth and fidelity in their servants and housekeepers, can be so painful and agonizing; if so, I should advise them to die at once, and save themselves further pain; for truth and fidelity being on the increase in the world, and all the nations and people, by God's providence, advancing in that direction, their milky minds and soft nerves will not survive it long.

"Painful fidelity" is a silly, absurd paradox, and I wish, now, to assert most positively, that painful labor in good works of Art, is an utter impossibility, and if the signs of careful, earnest drawing, and deep love for the Creator's work, in an artist, afflict you with any sense of agony or pain, look to yourself, for be sure it is you, who are wrong, not the artist or his picture. And if a young artist find that it is "agonizing" to him to draw nature as she is, and painful to be faithful, then most certainly he has mistaken his calling, and the sooner he gives it up and finds some more congenial employment, the better for himself and the world.

I should like some of these would-be critics, to prove logically, how work, that is a man's best enjoyment, and noblest pleasure, can be "painful or agonizing." All works of Art, whether pictures, statues, poems or novels, must eventually stand or fall according to the amount of truth in them, as Mr.

Ruskin says, "There are some faults slight in the sight of love, some errors slight in the estimate of wisdom; but Truth forgives no insult, and endures no stain." Those works that give to the world no facts at all, will sink into deserved oblivion, will travel from the gallery to the garret, from the garret to the kitchen, from the kitchen to the rag-pickers, from them to the fire. Amid all the revolutions of feeling, changes of climate, sentiment and ideas, truth remains the same, is easily ascertainable, unchanging and eternal; this is what we have to stand upon, these are our foundation stones, for by the nature of things, truth is of God, and leads to God; falsehood and faithlessness are of the devil, and lead to death. Do you suppose that the generations that follow us, continually increasing in wisdom and knowledge of truth and fact will care one straw for our fancy notions of Greeks and Romans, or for Mr. Lampblack's notions of subordinations of parts, the proper place for strong darks, and the texture and tone, that all pictures should possess; all of them, tricks that mean nothing, represent nothing, and are nothing—things that can be learned out of bad books, by any man that chooses to look for them? But, if we discover any new facts about the Greeks and Romans, or paint the facts of our daily life, which is our plainest duty, it must be valuable to all time.

Suppose, for the sake of illustration, that the face of Nature should entirely change, that trees were to grow differently, rocks be formed in a new way, and all the facts be altered, the generations that follow us would have nothing but our landscapes to tell them what the world looked like in the nineteenth century; think you they would form a very bright idea of i

from the works of Cole, Durand, Allston or Geo. L. Brown? If a few Pre-Raphaelites had lived and painted before the flood, do you not think we should value their works very highly? Do you suppose, for a moment, that we should fight about the "painfulness" of their fidelity, or, if they had painted the Saviour's life and acts, think you we should quarrel with them and refuse to be instructed simply because they were carefully drawn and faithfully painted? I am inclined to think this would be our principal cause of admiration and belief. Time and future generations will ask of our Art and our Literature, "Is this the way the people of the nineteenth century worked, dressed and acted? Are these their passions, principles and feelings? Is this the Palisades, and the North River, and the Catskills in the year 1863? If not, they are valueless to us, however perfectly they may conform to rules of Art in texture, tone and central light; for Nature is absolutely right; it makes no difference to her whether Durand looks upon her, or W. T. Richards; an Elm leaf is still oval and pointed, and a Hickory leaf long and sharp, and summer's foliage still green, and shadows on tree stems still purple, and rocks still stratified, although Geo. L. Brown and Wust continue to insist upon it that they are not.

Another of the objections made against us is, that we draw every leaf on a tree that is three miles off, with all the careful precision with which we draw leaves right in the foreground. It is true that we draw every leaf, and yet there are no leaves—only masses of light, and shade, and color, produced by the leaves; and we insist on these masses being drawn with the same "painful fidelity" that every weed, leaf and stone in the foreground is, for these masses tell the specific characters

of the tree or rock. An Elm tree, in the distance, takes a particular form, and produces a mass of light and shade that is entirely different from any other, and could not, by any possibility, be produced by an Oak, or a Chestnut, or a Pine; but some artists seem to think that any lumpy mass of light and dark will do for trees or rocks in the distance. How much better would it be for the persons who make such objections to tell the plain, simple truth, and say, we have never thought about the matter or looked carefully at a naturalistic picture, and therefore are not competent to give our opinion; for what they say amounts to nothing more nor less. A noble work it would be for us who talk so much about truth, and insist on the absolute facts of everything, and for Mr. Ruskin, who has devoted his whole life to ascertaining the positive facts in Nature and Art, to come forward to the support of a set of men, who were painting uncompromising falsehood, under the pretence of painting uncompromising truth. It is just as wrong for a man to paint leaves when he cannot see leaves, as for the old fogies to paint trees and weeds that are close to the spectator, with a few careless daubs of the brush, that mean nothing but imbecility, and look like nothing but the paint-pot.

I suppose the next argument that will be brought to bear upon us is, that every one sees differently. "What right," it will be said, "have you to set up your sight as the only right, when, every individual being differently constituted, every man sees things differently from every other?" And yet, would you believe it, these very same people that defend the old school on this ground, are continually expressing positive opinions on pictures! They will go and get their portraits

painted, and have the audacity to say, positively, it is not like them ; or, they will have the old fogies paint their pretty wives, and when the picture is finished, and looks like a pasteboard doll, they will dare to say, "This is not my wife ;" instead of being consistent, and saying, "Ah, I see ; this artist did not see as I do ; I saw in my wife a woman with a good deal of character and loveliness, and he saw nothing but a pasteboard inanity. Well, I am sorry, but it is natural ; of course, everybody sees differently, so I must pocket the insult, and pay for it, and never hope to get what I see in her painted."

What poor, weak, inconsistent mortals we are. We go about, looking at pictures, and saying, this is not like Brown, that is not like Jones, this is not a good view of Irvington, that is not a good picture of the White Mountains, at the same time, believing as we do, that men see things so differently, that a rock that we see stratified horizontally, it is perfectly right for them to paint perpendicular ; and a tree on which we can see a great number of very lovely leaf forms, it is quite legitimate for them to paint one stupid, round, meaningless mass of brown. Is this consistent ? If men are allowed to see so differently, we have no earthly right to give an opinion on Art matters, except to say, I see this tree green, the artist saw it brown, it is all *right*.

It is, to a certain extent, true that men see differently. A near-sighted man does not see near so much in a landscape as I do ; but I do not think many sensible people could prefer the near-sighted vision to the strong one. But, in men of good average vision, there will be a slight difference in their sight of things. The sight is affected, of course, by the mind and the feelings.

One man will see more of the gracefulness of things, another, more of the strength and growth, and the last, more of the light and shade ; and yet, if three men, who could draw thoroughly *well*, were set to work on the same subject, the difference in the forms of things drawn would be so slight as hardly to be recognized by the general public ; yet there would be a very positive difference, and yet it is not only right, but the *duty* of everybody who buys pictures, or expresses an opinion on Art matters, to insist most positively, that a leaf that is round, shall not be made oblong, or a shadow that is on the left, put in the centre, or a tree whose stem lines curve gracefully, be made straight and even, or a man whose nose is crooked, be made straight, or a woman who has noble character, be made weak and moonlighty, for they are just as much on one side as on the other. It is the absolute facts of everything that we are fighting for, and not for smoothness, not for execution, but for truth and reality. It is also believed by some rather sensible people in other respects, that all we wish to do or to teach, is painting in a small manner, covering the canvas all over with little touches, consequently when they see a picture in an Exhibition, fiddled all over with little niggling spots of paint, and looking as smooth as a Japanned tea tray, (as seen in the works of several of the modern Germans,) they say, "Oh, there is a Pre-Raphaelite picture !" they never stop to think, (thinking on Art matters being at a decided discount,) or ask whether it is the facts of any given place, or whether it was all manufactured in the studio, it is all the same to them, it is little work, and therefore must be Pre-Raphaelite. Now little niggling work or great abundance of work, is *utterly*

valueless, unless it expresses the absolute facts of the things represented. Fine delicate execution, is valuable, (not for itself at all,) but only because it enables an artist to tell more truth, and to paint a thing more completely, than coarse, clumsy execution ; but a truth told in a coarse, clumsy manner, showing all the signs of paint, and human weakness, is infinitely more valuable to the world than inane nothingness, or absolute falsehood, painted with all the marvelous skill, and delicacy of touch, of a Mieris, or a Gerard Douw.

It is said by connoisseurs, who have been in Italy, have studied art, and learned from man the lamentable mistake the Creator made in putting leaves on trees, and making them *green*, instead of brown, and making rocks purple instead of black,—“ Yes, I know it is nature, but when I buy pictures, I want *Art* ; we see nature every day. The artist’s duty is to improve nature, and serve her up in soft dishes, plentifully diluted with man’s mind and the studio”—but this shows such a lack of feeling and common sense, that it is altogether too absurd to need any answer. In all the other objections made against us, there is *some* reason, they are formed of perverted facts, but this is the lowest depth of degradation. Oh, that people would take the trouble to think on this subject, but they will not do it, they say, “ it is a mere matter of opinion, I like brown trees, my neighbor likes green ones, we are both *right*, and the pictures are all right.” Oh, if the picture buyers and Art patrons would only insist on a young man being able to draw, before they would buy a picture of him, and that, if he painted an Elm tree, it should be like an Elm tree, what a reformation they would bring about ; they hold the Arts of the

country in their pockets, they can influence the artists in any way they please, they could make all the artists draw well, and study earnestly, or they can shut them up in the studio to pander to their own ignorance of God’s work, which latter they do most effectually.

But Art is not dead yet, nor the artists entirely depraved and lost. There is some vitality and life in it yet. In spite of dash and boldness, creeds, conventions, and the trammels of misguided patrons, it overflows and finds expression in the intensely-earnest painting of the fields, trees, and weeds and the noble love of little things, found in the present reaction, rising in Europe, where the culture is largest, it rolls steadily onward, until it breaks on the American shores of the Atlantic, and spreads over the whole continent, and all the cities of the world feel the shock of the great truth that is sweeping over them, shaking the old conventional ideas and superstitions to their very foundations ; dropping its beautiful seeds like daisies on a lawn, and soon you see them poking up their heads fresh and very green, and they grow apace and flourish, putting out their slender strong roots, and seizing on everything that is good and true. If ever a body of men stood on a foundation of granite, it is the Pre-Raphaelites, and if ever a cause was absolutely sure, it is their cause, for it is God’s work they are doing, and the more the world advances in civilization and knowledge, the more they will appreciate and admire the work of these men. It is the Art of the future, the Art of progress, the Art of Science and of Religion ;—as Ruskin so well expresses it, “ This Art is the expression of man’s love to God, and the other the expression of man’s love for himself.” All that is necessary is

patient perseverance, strong faith and determination to do the *truth*, and be true at any and every sacrifice, conscious that all opposition must cease when faced by fact, and as time

goes on, and civilization advances, the men who would live *must* be with us, and those who will not sail in our boat, must sink to rise no more.

OUR "ARTICLES" EXAMINED.

An Essay Read before the Association, at the Regular Meeting, Tuesday, March 17th, 1863.

BY RUSSELL STURGIS, JR.

Concluded.

This peculiar Art of the Greeks remained the governing Art of the European world for centuries after the time of its highest glory. The era of Rome's ascendancy presents this phenomenon, that the conquering nation was without art, and with no religion nor literature self-asserting enough to be independent of the conquered. Rome was as great a lawmaker as a war maker, and organized into an homogeneous strength the multifarious nations she subdued, nations having nothing in common but their forced obedience to the great central brain power of the Latin aristocracy. But Egyptian Art was left to run its course, so that people forget, as they see Egypt preserved in the dreary London Gallery, that those statues of this or that god, which are so alike to the casual observer, and of the same block, seemingly, of speckled granite, are older and younger by three thousand years. And Greek Art was called on to expand itself to meet the new requirements, to beautify the colossal palaces of popular or imperial luxury, and to wed itself to systems of building never dreamed of by the easily-satisfied and uninventive Greeks. The attempt hopelessly failed. For a while the Greek sculptors worked for their imperial patrons as they had worked for the even more absolute Demus, and, amid a host of inferior statues and groups, a few remain to us of unapproachable greatness, produced during the reigns of the earlier Emperors. But nothing more was achieved, the Art could not or would not decorate the round-arched and vaulted Roman work, had no rules for making *architecture* out of this new sort of *building*, finally left it to itself, to go on to such triumphs of constructive excellence

and of naked ugliness as it might choose.

Remember what was said above of the limited range resulting from the Greek demand for perfected human sculpture, and see, now, how helpless this Greek Art is when it is called on to solve these new and mighty problems, propounded to it by Roman wealth and grandeur. What Phidias would have done if called on to build a Colosseum we do not know; genius has an answer of its own to all sorts of questions, and sure to be an answer that you and I would *not* think of, but what his disciples would say to it is evident enough.

Not that the Romans were very pressing in their demands. It was rather the fashion to have a statue by some great Greek master, probably a portrait of some famous ancestor, possibly a Venus, or a bas-relief of mythological legend. Moreover their lamps and lamp-stands, tripods and vases of bronze, were carefully enough designed by Greek artists who made it their business, or copied after what were to them antiques. The great public baths, moreover, and the palace halls of the gorgeous Emperors, were receptacles for great groups; Laocoons, and Belvedere Apollos, and what not. And the Triumphal arches, and trophies like Trajan's column, were encrusted with commemorative bas-relief; telling its story plainly enough, though hopelessly devoid of artistic merit. And these lordly Romans were the first to bethink them that a hero looked more heroic on his horse's back, and so set up equestrian statues. Still, I repeat, they were not pressing in their demands. Because, when the sculptors did all this, and declined to do more, the indifferent Romans went